

## PRÁCTICA 4. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

### SONNET 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

#### 4.1. Mistakes to avoid when commenting a poem: The case of *My mistress' eyes*

**DESCRIPTION:** In the first line, the poet says the eyes of his mistress are like the sun, then he moves to her lips and he compares them with “coral”. In line 3, he says the breasts are “dun”, which is a brown colour, and then her hair is black. Then he compares her with “red and white colours” of the rose, and talks about the “perfume” she has. Then he says she has a beautiful sound like music, who is like a goddess walking. **Mark: FAIL**

**INVENTION:** In this poem, the I voice is comparing her Lady with a rose, I think they are lovers and they had a previous relationship which is unfaithful because she is not very beautiful. The Lady however the poet loves her, but she is corrupted, she is not pretty, maybe because of an illness like in “The Sick Rose”, and the lover is the worm who compares her with a “Goddess”. I think she was probably married and the I voice is the lover who loves her despite her family and society. **Mark: FAIL**

**ANALYSIS:** In this sonnet, the I voice is making a description of his beloved in a shocking and unexpected way, taking advantage of the comparisons and metaphors which have been traditionally employed in poetry to describe the beauty of a woman only to reverse and deny them in a systematic and thorough way. The ultimate purpose of the I voice is to proclaim his love, however atypical in terms of physical beauty and moral virtues, is for him as dear and true as the idealised beauties that appear in Petrarchan poetry. **Mark: PASS**

#### 4.2. Mistakes to avoid when commenting a poem: The case of *My mistress' eyes*

##### **A) PERSONAL INTERPRETATION** ✓

I think there is an interesting relationship between this poem and sonnet 18 by Shakespeare (“Shall I compare thee...”) In that sonnet the beloved is immortalised by means of the power of poetry (“So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/So long lives this and this gives life to thee”). The beauty of the beloved is the origin of the I voice’s love and triggers his wish to make him immortal in verse. Interestingly enough, the beloved of sonnet 130 is far from being beautiful, however, the fact that the I voice loves her and describes her in this poem is also making her immortal.

##### **B) INVENTION** ✗

I think there is an interesting relationship between this poem and “The Flea” by John Donne, because in that poem the I voice is trying to convince the Lady to have sex with him, and in this sonnet the I voice is trying to convince the Lady that she is beautiful, that despite how ugly she may be for others, she is beautiful for him and that’s what counts and that is the reason he loves her.

##### **C) PERSONAL INTERPRETATION** ✓

As Shakespeare himself wrote in sonnet 144 (“Two loves I have of comfort and despair”), he was perplexed by the conflicting feelings he harboured for both the young, beautiful male beloved and for the old, ugly woman who appears in this sonnet. I think he may have written this poem in an attempt to come to terms with his own feelings, which are also very shocking for us readers.

##### **D) INVENTION** ✗

Shakespeare was tired of the beautiful boy not paying attention to him and this is the reason why he decided to find a prostitute. She is old and ugly but he loves her nonetheless, maybe because any love is better than no love at all. In that way, Shakespeare was also revenging himself on the beautiful boy, and was also making him jealous.

#### 4.3. Mistakes to avoid when commenting a poem: The case of *My mistress' eyes*

##### **A) DESCRIPTION** ✘

In the first line of the poem, the eyes of the mistress are compared to the sun, which is bright and shining. In this way, the I voice says the eyes of the mistress are not like the sun (“My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun”), so probably they are not as beautiful and shiny as the sun. This in an interesting comparison, because the poet is saying the sun is more beautiful than the mistress, and that she is not as pretty as the sun. He is probably talking about the eyes because the eyes are the most beautiful part of the mistress, and for a poet, if they are not like the sun, then is a problem.

##### **B) ANALYSIS** ✔

In the first line of the poem, the eyes of the mistress are compared in a negative way with the sun, in that her eyes probably lack the shine and intensity of the star (“My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun”) This is an interesting comparison, since the sun is a typical image used in poetry to describe the eyes of the beloved person, not only because of the obvious similarities (round globe full of brightness), but also because the gaze of the beloved ignites love and passion in the lover (sending ‘rays’ of love). This is the first Petrarchan convention the I voice is going to call into question in his poem, and I think it makes sense, because the idea of the beloved being central to the lover’s life (the “sun” around which the lover revolves) was a common place in Petrarchan poetry, and it is precisely this ‘centrality’ which the I voice is intent on challenging, and he will do so in this very ironic and honest criticism on the stereotypes of female beauty.